Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Cleanup Team Workshop

Health and Environmental Risk Communication

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Presenter: Kevin Delaney

Risk Communication Team

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and
   Preventive Medicine

(410) 671-2953 Fax (410) 671-8170 (DSN 584-
   5217)

CHPPM on the Web @ chppm-ww.apgea.army.mil

Why Risk Communication?

- Scientists and engineers were having a difficult time communicating study results effectively, resulting in:

  - Failure to alleviate public concern
  - Failure to address customer concerns
  - Requirement to complete additional studies

Low Trust and/or High Concern

- Results in limited attention/retention
  - 15% - 20% efficiency
- Why?
  - Denial of issue
  - Trauma from issue
  - Competing agendas
  - Emotional arousal

Implications of Limited Attention/Retention

- Limited number of messages
- Repetition of messages
- Time limitations

Key Community Concerns

- Health
- Economics
- Aesthetics
- Process

- Safety
- Environment
- Fairness/Equity
- Legal Issues

Ethical Principles

- Risk Communication tools and techniques should not be used to mislead people about ourselves or others

- Risk Communication tools and techniques should not be used to mislead people about any issues

- We should not unnecessarily raise the level of concern for any party

Three Key Messages

- P = R
  - Perception **_IS_** Reality
- G = T + C
  - Our Goal is to establish Trust and Credibility
- C = S
  - Communication is a Skill

Perception - Jargon

- Groundwater
- Remediation
- CDC
- Fugitive emissions
- Toxicologist
- Industrial hygienist
- 10E-6

- Exceed the standard
- Below the standard
- "Leachate that is leaching into the groundwater that is migrating off site in a plume"

Perception - Risk Weighting Factors

Factor	*Weight*
Trust……………………………..	2000
Benefit………………………….	1000
Control (Voluntary)…………………..	1000
Fairness (Share)………………..	500
Alternatives……………………..	500
Catastrophe……………………...	300

Perception - Four Hit Theory of Belief Formation

- Once formed, beliefs are very difficult to change
- Four (on average) unanswered credible hits of information will support belief formation
- Hits from one side can negate hits from the other side
- One negative = Three positive
- After first hit - 48 hours of active search

Perception - Negatives

$$N = 3P$$

Perception - Negatives

- Repetition of a negative allegation or accusation, even when refuted, results in reinforcement and reaffirmation of the initial allegation or accusation

Perception - Negatives

- Negative words to avoid:
  - No
  - Not
  - Never
  - Nothing
  - None

Perception - Negatives

- Negative words/phrases
  - Contamination
  - Pollution
  - Toxic
  - Dangerous
  - Concern
  - Any words or phrases with strong negative connotations
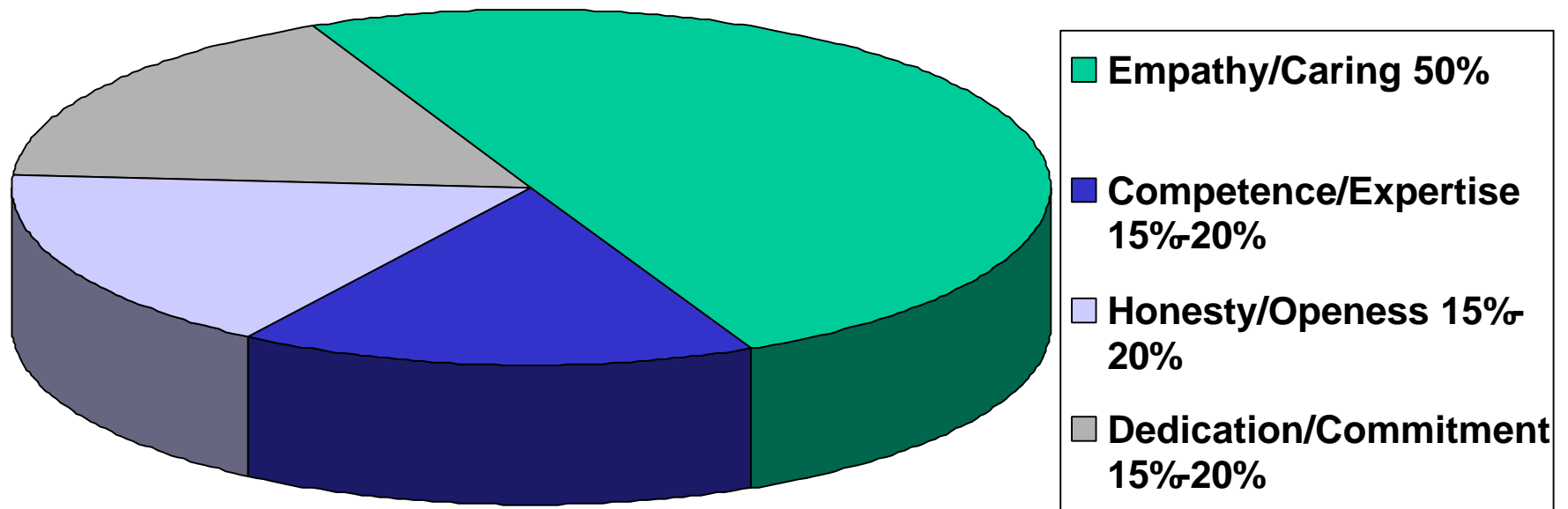
Non-Verbal Communication

- Can provide up to 50% - 75% of message content

- Noticed intensely by the audience

- Interpreted negatively

- Overrides verbal communication

Non-Verbal Communication

- Eyes
  - Eye contact
  - Where to look

- Hands
  - Visible, open palm

- Posture
  - 5° forward of vertical

Trust and Credibility

Trust and Credibilty Factors
(Low Trust and/or High Concern)

- Empathy/Caring 50%
- Competence/Expertise 15%–20%
- Honesty/Openess 15%–20%
- Dedication/Commitment 15%–20%

Trust and Credibility

- Credibility Transference
  - A lower credibility source takes on the credibility of the highest credible source that agrees with its position on an issue

Trust and Credibility

- Credibility Reversal
  - When a lower credibility source attacks the credibility of a higher credibility source, the lower credibility source loses more credibility
  - The only information source that can effectively attack the credibility of another information source, is an information source of equal or higher credibility

Trust and Credibility

- The G4 or Critical Mass Theory of Government Credibility Transfer
  - The sum total of the credibility of any four government agencies is substantially greater than the sum total of the credibility of the individual agencies

Communication Skills

- Seven Part Communication Structure
  - Empathy/Caring or statement of commitment
  - State three key messages
  - Key message 1 with two supporting facts
  - Key message 2 with two supporting facts
  - Key message 3 with two supporting facts
  - Repeat three key message
  - Provide future actions

Communication Skills

- The "Level 6" Answer
  - 1. Express empathy/concern
  - 2. Provide a 7-12 word soundbite conclusion
  - 3. Provide supporting fact #1
  - 4. Provide supporting fact #2
  - 5. Repeat conclusion exactly as stated before
  - 6. Provided future action

Communication Skills

- Answering difficult questions
  - "Declared Victory"
  - "Commitment"

Communication Skills

- Hedging words to avoid:
  - Maybe
  - Possibly
  - Perhaps
  - Depending

Communication Skills

Public Meetings
VS.
Open Houses

Effective Public Meetings

- Moderator
- Anticipated issues/questions
- Presentation skills

Public Meeting Guidelines

- Interruptions
- Number/duration of comments or questions
- Agenda/adjournment

Public Dialogue Model

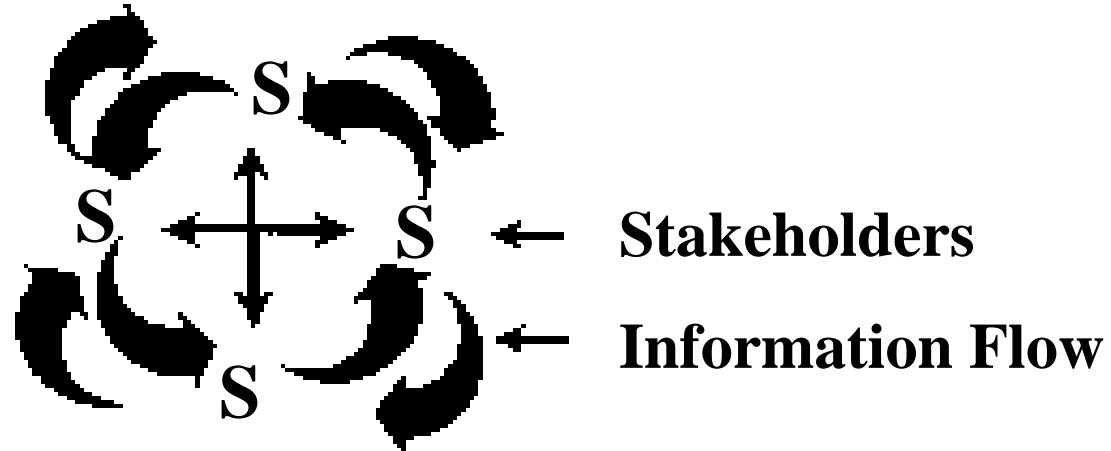**Stakeholders**

Information Flow

Exhibit & Public Discussion

- Potential Uses
  - Use immediately prior to and/or after scheduled public meeting
  - Use as supplement to or substitute for public meeting

Exhibit & Public Discussion

- Logistics
  - Present information in four to six exhibits
  - Schedule for four to six hours duration
  - Arrange posters to highlight key messages:
    - Use three key messages
    - Put one key message per central poster
    - Have supplemental material on side posters
  - Space exhibits around meeting area to enhance discussions

Exhibit & Public Discussion

- Logistics (cont.)
  - Have trained presenters at each exhibit
  - Use master presenter for crisis intervention/difficult situations/quality control
  - Invite outside independent experts
  - Consider inviting participation by special/ public interest groups
  - Provide method for public to leave comments

Exhibit & Public Discussion

- Logistics (cont.)
  - Discourage clustering of presenters
  - Ensure presenters maintain appropriate decorum
  - Schedule for day of week convenient for local community or target audience
  - Arrange for refreshments
  - Invite opinion leaders as attendees
  - Provide assistance for people with special needs

Elements of Poster Stations

- Illustration/Graphics
  - (4-6 grade level)
- Conclusion/Sound bite
  - (6-8 grade level; 7-12 words; large letters)
- Executive summary/Supporting facts
  - (6-8 grade level; 5-7 lines; large letters)

- Detailed description
  - (8-12 grade level; 15-20 lines)
- Table documentation/ Supporting information
  - (positive executive statement; legal documentation)

Elements of Poster Stations

- Expert presenter trained in environmental risk communication

- Handouts/take away information

- Log for recording comments

- Stenographer/tape recorder/interpreter

- Simple color design